1: Linton E-5 (1926-27) 1933 FY8 Tanala FY8

THE TANALA, A HILL TRIBE OF MADAGASCAR

I. INTRODUCTION

The island of Madagascar lies off the southeast coast of Africa, with its long axis running approximately north-northeast by south-southwest. It is the third largest island in the world, with a length of approximately 1,000 miles and an average width of 250 miles. It includes regions of rather diverse climate and natural resources. /131

Along the eastern side of Madagascar, extending almost from end to end, there is a series of mountain ranges. These mountains rise to an elevation of 2,000 meters in places and form the watershed for the entire island. From them rivers flow eastward into the Indian Ocean and westward into the Mozambique Channel. In the north, the mountains are abrupt and rise directly from the sea. As one goes southward, they become lower and less abrupt, gradually dying out toward the southern end of the island, and there is a narrow coastal plain. At the southern end of the mountains this plain turns westward and includes all the southern tip of the island. /133

On the western side of the massif there is a great plateau, also mountainous, which has an elevation of about 1,000 meters in the central part. This slopes off gradually toward the west and south. Along its western edge there are broken mountain ranges, lower than those on the east.

The eastern slope of the massif and the eastern coastal plain are characterized by an extremely hot and humid climate. It rains almost daily during all months. Coast and mountains are covered by a dense growth of tropical jungle, so heavy as to be almost impassable. This is the most unhealthy part of the island and fever takes a heavy toll of both Europeans and plateau natives. /132 [164]

The plateau is characterized by a rather dry, temperate climate with a moderate seasonal rainfall. From late May to early September there is hardly any rain and the temperature falls almost to the freezing point at night. Traditionally, the eastern and central parts of the plateau were once densely forested and this is borne out by the occasional finding of large logs buried in swamps. Agriculture by the cutting and burning method, coupled with cattle grazing, has completely deforested it and most of it is now open grass land. This region is comparatively healthy and there is said to have been little or no fever here prior to the construction of the railroad from Tananarive to the east coast. [137] [496]

132 137 On the western slope of the plateau and in the extreme south the climate is hot and semi-arid to arid. The ground is covered with clumps of low trees and thorny scrub, interspersed with stretches of grass land. In many places it is difficult to obtain water. In spite [164] of the aridity there is much fever in this region, making it unhealthy for Europeans.

101 The various environments just described are reflected in the culture of the natives of the different regions. The people of the east coast are mainly fishermen and agriculturalists, with little dependence on cattle. Those of the plateau are mainly agricultural, but with cattle of greater economic importance. Those of the south and west subsist almost entirely on their herds. (For a discussion of these [113] differences see Linton: Culture Areas in Madagascar, American Anthropology, Vol. XXX, No. 3.)

[131] The Tanala occupy approximately the southern third of the eastern massif. Their territory lies roughly between 20° 30′ and 22° 30′ south latitude and between 46° and 46° 30′ east longitude. On the east they extend, in places, to within a day's march of the sea, but nowhere reach the coast. On the west and south their territory everywhere ends at the edge of the open grass lands.

As neighbors they have, on the south and southwest, the Bara, who are a cattle people with a culture of west coast type. On the west lie the Betsileo and on the northwest the Imerina, both of plateau culture. On the north are the Bezanozano, of mixed plateau and east coast culture, and on the northeast the Betsimisaraka, of east coast culture. On the east lie three tribes, the Antambahoaka, Antaimorona and Antaifasina, who claim Arab descent and unquestionably have come under strong Arab influence.

177 The Tanala thus lie at the meeting point of four rather distinct types of culture. Influences from all of these can be traced in the historic culture of the tribe. However, the extent and importance of these influences vary greatly in different parts of the Tanala territory. The region inhabited by the Tanala Ikongo, in the south, presented few natural obstacles to invasion and was relatively desirable. It lay between the territories of two unusually vigorous and aggressive tribes, the Bara and Antaimorona. As a result, it was constantly being entered by groups coming from the southeast coast and cattle areas. These conquered and amalgamated with the earlier inhabitants, imposing much of their own culture.

177 166 The territory of the Tanala Menabe, in the north, was much less desirable. It was extremely mountainous, with almost impenetrable

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On the western side of the divide the forest is lower and more open, resembling moderately heavy second growth timber in the eastern United States. In the bottoms grow clumps of tall raffia palms. Forest and open grass lands meet in an irregular line. This line is the real western boundary of the Tanala country. A few of their villages are in the open, but hardly one is out of sight of the forest.

On the eastern side of the divide there is daily rain at all seasons. On the west there is a seasonal change, comparable to that in the plateau, the rainiest months being December to February. Because of the altitude the climate is temperate throughout most of the Tanala country. During the winter season it becomes unpleasantly cold, with frost in the low places and heavy morning fogs that chill one to the bone. Even in summer it is rarely uncomfortably hot.

Throughout the whole of the Tanala country there is a multitude of streams and rivers. These are mostly swift, with many falls and rapids so that canoe travel is unprofitable. There are a few small lakes. In the bottoms of some valleys one encounters rather extensive swamps, which become impassable during the rainy season.

From the point of view of natural resources, the region is not especially tempting. Wild food is scarce and hard to get and agriculture involves heavy labor in cutting and burning the forest. Grazing is rather poor and cattle do not thrive in such a wet climate. In opposition to this, the forest affords an abundance of good timber, far beyond the local needs, raffia, rubber and other products, and there are considerable deposits of iron ore. The latter are neither rich enough nor extensive enough to be of much value for export purposes. There are also deposits of other valuable minerals, crystal and gold, but these meant nothing to the first settlers. Although there are traces of ancient gold working in many parts of the Tanala territory, the natives do not seem to have mined the gold themselves.

Perhaps the greatest gift which the region offers to settlers is a relative immunity from attack. The terrain makes large-scale invasion almost impossible. Moreover, the country was fairly healthy prior to the opening up of regular communication with the coast. People driven from the plateau could settle in the higher forest without fear of the deadly coast fevers.

very strong, however, for the Antaifasina say that they are unable to cure the malady and are accustomed to turn over the victims to the French medical authorities for treatment.

The ceremonial side of spirit possession is most highly developed among those tribes which show the most African influence and it seems possible that the whole idea is ultimately traceable to Africa. However, it has become thoroughly incorporated into the native culture. I never heard a non-Christian native express scepticism regarding it and even the Christians are convinced of its reality and treat it by prayer and exorcism.

Spirit possession is always intermittent. Physically it is characterized by trembling and twitching, increasing in violence until the subject begins to dance. The attack usually ends in unconsciousness and rigidity. When the subject is revived he is normal and has no memory of what has occurred. A few of the victims may be true epileptics, but in most cases they seem to suffer from nothing more than acute hysteria. A Tanala woman of the Manandriana gens told me that she might become possessed at any time or place. Her heart would begin to beat violently and everything before her eyes would become wavering and indistinct "as though she were looking through heat waves in strong sunlight." When this happened she knew that the possessing spirit was coming and would begin to dance. She had never seen or heard the spirit and this was the only way in which she was conscious of its presence. Ratzakoba, a Tanala informant of the Zafindiamanana gens, told me that a person subject to possession would begin to tremble and twitch when he heard a drum, or a person crying, or when he felt any strong emotion, as joy at the return of a long-absent relative. All informants agreed that the malady was contagious and that if one person became possessed all those present who were subject to possession would also be attacked. I witnessed a case of this sort during a ceremony at the royal Sakalava tombs at the village of Mahabo. A woman became possessed and a man near her was seized almost immediately. As he was a person of importance all attention was centered on him and the woman recovered in a few minutes without help. Among the Imerina there was a great epidemic of possession in 1863–64, which seems to have been quite comparable to some episodes in medieval European history.

Satisfactory accounts of spirit possession and the methods for its cure were obtained from the Zafindiamanana and Manandriana gentes of the Tanala Menabe. It is known to occur with at least equal frequency among the Ikongo, but no exact information was

XII. LIFE CYCLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Conception

842 The Tanala do not believe that conception is possible without intercourse, but the average individual's ideas of the mechanics of conception are rather vague. It is plain that they have not thought much about it. The wisest say that the child is formed from the blood of the parents. The semen, which is regarded as a form of blood, mingles with the blood of the mother at her next menstrual 843 period and coagulates it. The clot is added to monthly and the foetus gradually takes shape from it. The eyes are the first parts to take recognizable form, appearing in the second or third month. The period of gestation seems to be rather accurately known.

842 The Imerina and Betsileo, who held similar beliefs regarding the formation of the foetus, did not understand that intercourse was necessary. They did not believe that a virgin could bear a child, but held that the first intercourse began the process of child bearing and that after this a normal woman would continue to bear children at fairly regular intervals without male intervention. This idea was held so strongly that children born to an unmarried widow several years after her husband's death were accounted his actual children and shared equally in his property.

843 Intercourse continues during the early stages of pregnancy, but there seem to be no special rules governing it. It is not considered necessary to the growth of the foetus. Abortion may sometimes be practiced by unmarried mothers, but the natives are reticent in regard to it and I could not learn the methods. It is certainly rare.

842 Sterility was formerly rare, but is now somewhat on the increase, due to the introduction of venereal diseases. It is commonly thought [144] to be the woman's fault, but if a man marries more than one wife without having children it is recognized that the fault lies with him. The reasons commonly assigned are sexual excess prior to marriage and especially incest. Malevolent sorcery was never mentioned as a cause. It is considered a calamity and ombiasy do a thriving business in charms and medicines for its cure.

Pregnancy Taboos

843 During pregnancy both parents are subject to various taboos. The most important one for the husband is that he must not have intercourse with any woman, other than a plural wife, while his wife is

kept clean, being bathed at least once a day with cold water. Very small children are carried in the arms almost constantly, husbands and older children doing their share. From the age of about four months on, the child is carried in the back of its mother's dress (see Costume). It is supported by the belt about her waist and sits with its legs on either side of her body and its head and shoulders protruding above the garment. It is protected from sun and rain by a small mat hung about her neck. These baby covers are always made by the women themselves and it is impossible to purchase one which has been in use, although this seems to be only a matter of sentiment on the mother's part. The child remains on the mother's back except at night or when it is being nursed. I have often seen women with children on their backs working in the fields, the baby sleeping soundly although its head was jerked to and fro by her movements. Children continue to be carried for some time after they can walk. 354

No clothing is worn under the age of about three years. Even when carried on the back, there is no equivalent for the European diaper. As soon as the child begins to be carried in the mother's dress it is slapped for befouling her and it learns to control its functions at a surprisingly early age. This was the only offense for which I ever saw a Tanala child punished. [163]

Nursing seems to be continued as long as the mother's milk holds out, although the infant is given a little rice or other soft food as soon as it will take it. There is no idea of regularity in feeding and the child is given the breast whenever it cries. It is generally believed that a new pregnancy has a bad effect on the health of the child next older. As many mothers are still nursing when the pregnancy begins, this belief probably has a sound basis of fact, but they ascribe the poor health of the older child to its jealousy of the coming one. 353

Infant mortality is excessively high and even prior to European contact the population must have remained almost static. No statistics are available but practically every family I knew had lost one or more children in infancy. The greatest loss seems to be from intestinal diseases, but small children also suffer from malaria. Adults, on the other hand, appear to be almost immune as long as they remain in their own districts. When they go elsewhere, they are liable to contract it, although usually in a milder form than Europeans. 165 169

CIRCUMCISION

All males are circumcised, but there is no corresponding operation for females. The circumciser is a professional, but the trade is not 304